

19

Sāra Sutta

The Heartwood Discourse | S 48.55/5:231

Theme: The faculty of wisdom is the state most conducive for awakening

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1 Meaning and usages of *indriya***1.0 MEANING OF *INDRIYA***

1.0.1 Etymology. The Pali term *indriya* (neut n, ts) is a Sanskrit loanword, which is used to the exclusion of the Middle Indian form *indiya*.¹ The Vedic *indriya* (adj) has only the meaning “belonging to Indra”; and as a noun (neut), “strength, might (cf *inda*).”

1.0.2 As a Buddhist term. In the specific historical Pali, it means “belonging to the ruler or leader,” that is, “(adj) governing, ruling; (n) governing, ruling or controlling principle.” *Indriya* is one of the most comprehensive and important categories in Buddhist ethics, psychology and philosophy. Its range of meanings include: “power, faculty; controlling principle, directive force” (Vism 491,5 f) and also determining characteristics.

1.0.3 Buddhist usages. It is found in the suttas and early texts in the following usages:

- [1.1] the 5 sense-faculties (or 6, including mind), and also the sense of “determining principle, sign, mark”;
- [1.2] the 5 mental faculties;
- [1.3] the 3 controlling principles;
- [1.4] the 5 faculties of feeling;
- [1.5] the 3 faculties of knowledge.

Many other groupings of *indriyas* according to varying scholastic viewpoints are found especially in the Abhidhamma texts (eg Vbh 125-234). A full list of 22 faculties (*bāvīsati'indriyāni*)²—5 + 5 + 3 + 5 + 3 + 1 (*jīvit'indriya*, life-faculty)—is given in the Abhidhamma texts.³

1.1 THE SENSES AND FACULTIES

1.1.1 The sense-faculties. The basic meanings of *indriya* are: “power, energy, effort, (governing or controlling) faculty,” and primarily and most frequently refer to the 5 sense-faculties (*pañca'indriyāni*) or physical senses, namely:

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) sight, | <i>cakkhu'ndriya</i> | |
| (2) hearing, | <i>sot'indriya</i> | |
| (3) smell, | <i>ghān'indriya</i> | |
| (4) taste, | <i>jīvh'indriya</i> | |
| (5) touch, | <i>kāy'indriya</i> | (M 1:226,17) ⁴ |

and to which is added

- (6) mind, the “sixth sense,”⁵ *man'indriya*

¹ Cf Prakrit *indiya* and see Sadd 786,3-5, quoted sv *indiya*.

² For their etyms, defs, explanations, exegeses, see S 5:193-243 (Indriya Sāmyutta); *indriyānam ādhipateyy'attho abhiññeyyo*, Pm 1:17,4 (≈ 21,6; 74,21; 2:21,26; 161,13); Vbh 122-134 (Indriya Vibhaṅga); Vism 491-493; DhsA 119-123 (cf DhsA:PR 157-163); AA 1:106,29-107,2; Sadd 785,18-786,2 (qu Vism); see also CPD: ind'attha.

³ Eg Vbh 122,3; Vism 491,5; Abhs 33,13. See also Abhidhāna-p, padīpikā 149b: *visayi tv akkham ~am* (cf Amara, kośa 3.2.28 *pratyakṣam syād aindriyakam*). On *indriya* & form (*rūpa*), see Dhs 125,21, 127,20; 147,9-15, 146,12, 175-179 passim; Vbh 13,6. Cf E Lamotte, *Traité* 3:1494.

⁴ Further see D 3:239,10 ≈ M 1:295,5 f = S 5:217,24 f; S 3:46,22, 5:205,8 f, 230,23; A 3:441,7 (AA 3:414,16); Tha 744 (Tha:N 1:231).

⁵ Obliquely alluded to, eg “In the world are five sense-pleasures taught, with the mind as the sixth” (*pañca kāma, -guṇā loke, mano, chaṭṭhā paveditā*, Sn 171a); also Dh 94 ≈ Tha 205, 206 (*mana, chaṭṭhāni*, ThaA 2:72,16), qu Nett 162,11; J 3:464,16* (Comy: *channaṃ indriyānam*), 466,28*; Sn 516 (*cakkh'ādāni cha indriyāni*, SnA 1:426,4), qu Nett 170,3 & Nm 1:244,1.

such as *mana, chaṭṭhāni indriyāni* (DA 1:166,1) and *cha-y-imāni bhikkhave indriyāni* (S 5:205,8).⁶

According to the Commentary of **the (Indriya) Suddhaka Sutta** (S 48.24) below, it is the eye-organ and a sense-faculty in the sense of controlling (*ādhipāteyya, saṅkhatena*) or dominating (*ind'atthena*) the states arisen at the eye-door, thus it is the “eye-faculty.” The same analysis applies to the other faculties. (SA 3:240)

SD 42.19(1.1.1)

(Indriya) Suddhaka Sutta

The Simple Discourse (on the Faculties) | S 48.25/5:205

Traditional: S 5.4.4.1 Saṃyutta Nikāya 5, Mahā Vagga 4, Indriya Saṃyutta 4, Sukh'indriya Vagga 1

Theme: The 6 sense- faculties

Bhikshus, there are these six faculties. What are the six?

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) The eye faculty. | <i>cakkhu'ndriya</i> |
| (2) The ear faculty | <i>sot'indriya</i> |
| (3) The nose faculty | <i>ghān'indriya</i> |
| (4) The tongue faculty | <i>jīvh'indriya</i> |
| (5) The body faculty | <i>kāy'indriya</i> |
| (6) The mind faculty | <i>man'indriya</i> |

These, bhikshus, are the six faculties.

— evaṃ —

1.1.2 Sense-restraint. The sense-faculties need to be restrained for the sake of mental cultivation and inner stillness. Various passages speak of such a restraint or controlling or custody of the senses.⁷

1.1.3 Decay of the faculties. Our sense-faculties decay with age. The texts often mention the “ripeness” or “over-ripeness” of our faculties, that is, their decaying due to old age.⁸

1.1.4 The faculties as reflecting inner state. A person of moral virtue and disciplined mind is often described as exuding calmness and serenity of the faculties, manifested in facial expression and complexion.⁹

1.1.5 The faculties of the dying. As death approaches, the faculties begin to deteriorate, and they are said to disperse back into space.¹⁰ A saint, as a rule, dies with the faculties serene.¹¹

1.2 THE 5 SPIRITUAL FACULTIES. In terms of meditation practice proper, we need to understand what the 5 faculties (*pañc'indriya*) [§3] are—as listed here in **the Sāra Sutta** (S 48.55), and how they work, which has been discussed in some detail elsewhere.¹² It is briefly mentioned here [2].

⁶ For further details, see CPD 2:302 f (1) & DP1:376 (1).

⁷ D 1:70,7, 172,19, 181,27; M 1:355,5; S 4:104,7; 176,1; A 1:113,19, 1:139,22; Dhs 230,36 (DhsA 399,32), 231,-19; Vbh 248,9 (Comys: *pihita,dvāra*, eg DA 182,7; AA 1:315,2); A 1:113,17, 2:39,14, 3:70,10 ≈ 71,8 ≈ 17 ≈ M 1:-32,9+18 (*chasa indriyesu asaṃvuta-kamma-dvārā*, MA 1:152,15), etc; D 3:213, 7,9; A 1:94,28; 3:173,23+30; 330,-2,8; It 23+2; 24,1; Nidd 1:14,2; 144,2 etc; Dhs 7,32; AA 1:46,31; BA 14,21. For more refs, see CPD 2:302: *indriya* §1a.

⁸ D 2:305,10 = M 1:49,22 = 3:249,18 = S 2:2,30 = 42,15 = Vbh 99,16 = 137,20 ≈ Dhs 144,23 = 154,3 = 166,34. Cf CPD: *indriya*, under °-*paripāka*.

⁹ V 1:8,13; 40,13 (qu DhA 1:92,5); D 2:205,10 (*mana,chaṭṭhānaṃ indriyānaṃ*, DA 638,1); D 2:190,24; M 1:170,-35 (≈ S 2:275,19), 3:2,7, 235,21; M 2:106,11 (*indriyāni nāma mano,viññeyyā dhammā*, MA 3:344,13); S 4:40,23 (*cakkhu,sot'adīnaṃ indriyānaṃ pakati,jahana,bhāvam*, SA 2:369,22); S 5:216,22 (*indriyāni nāma cakkhu,viññeyyāni*, SA 3:244,34); J 6:187,12* (Comy: *na vipassannāni*).

¹⁰ D 1:55,22 = M 1:515,10 = S 3:207,1 (*mana-c,chaṭṭhāni indriyāni ākāsaṃ pakkhandanti*, DA 166, 1); see also M 1:296,13 = S 4:294,14 (the difference btw a dead person and someone in cessation attainment); Saddhpy 280.

¹¹ The monk Phagguna dies serene, A 3:380,25.

¹² S 48.50/5:255 f & SD 10.4. See also D 3:234,15, 278,17; S 5:193-204, 219-243 (the 5 spiritual faculties (*indriya*) are the same as the 5 spiritual powers (*bala*): S 219-220; Miln 330,10, *pañc'indriyāni pañca balāni*; cf Nett

1.3 DERIVED MATTER AND CONTROLLING PRINCIPLES

1.3.1 The 24 kinds of derived matter. According to early Buddhism, our body is made up of nothing but the 4 primary elements (*mahā, bhūta*), that is, earth (the solid aspects), water (the liquid aspects), fire (heat and decay), and wind (movement, peristalsis and gaseousness).¹³ Furthermore, **form** as the “great elements” (*mahā, bhūta*) [3.3] comprises **24 kinds of derived matter or “form”** (*upādā, rūpa*), namely,¹⁴

The 5 sense-faculties (*pasāda, rūpa*): seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, body (1-5); the 5 sense objects: form, sound, smell, taste (6-9) (touch being identical with 3 of the great elements, namely, earth, fire and air);

(10) femininity;	<i>itth'indriya</i>
(11) masculinity;	<i>puris'indriya</i>
(12) physical base of the mind	<i>hadaya, vatthu</i> ¹⁵
(13) bodily intimation	<i>kāya, viññatti</i>
(14) verbal intimation	<i>vacī, viññatti</i>
(15) physical life	<i>rūpa, jīvitā</i>
(16) the space element	<i>ākāsa, dhātu</i>
(17) physical agility	<i>rupassa lahutā</i>
(18) physical elasticity	<i>rūpassa mudutā</i>
(19) physical adaptability	<i>rūpassa kammaññatā</i>
(20) physical growth	<i>rūpassa upacaya</i>
(21) physical continuity and	<i>rūpassa santati</i>
(22) decay	<i>jarā</i>
(23) impermanence	<i>aniccatā</i>
(24) food	<i>āhāra</i>

These 24 kinds of form are called the physical “body” (*rūpa, kāya*) in contrast to the mental body (*nāma, kāya*)—here “body” is a generic term meaning “group” or “collection,” and because the breath is a physical process, a dynamic cycle that goes through the cycle of arising and passing away. Hence, the breathing process, too, is said to be “a certain body amongst the bodies” because it is included in tangible object (“touch”) base (*phoṭṭabb'āyatana*).¹⁶

100,25); Pm 2:1-34 (Indriya Kathā); A 3:277,25, 5: V 1:183,2' = A 3:375,21 (VA 1081,27 ≈ AA 3:390,17: *saddhādīnāṃ indriyānaṃ samatāṃ, sama, bhāvaṃ*); S 5:200,18 f; A 2:149,25 f = 151 f, 3:373,19*; M 1:477,16, 478,11, 479,28 = A 4:77,19, 78,2,31 (*saddhādīni indriyāni samāni kurumānā*, MA 3:188,1; *saddhādīni vipassan'indriyāni samannāhāre thapayamāno*, AA 4:40,12); Abhāv 65,13; Ap 28,25 (*saddhādīnaṃ pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ*, ApA 235,2); Nett 18,33, 19,2, 162,16.

¹³ See **Mahā Rāhul, ovāda S** (M 62,8-12/2:421-423) & SD 3.11 (4). This Sutta deals with the “5 elements,” incl that of space.

¹⁴ See **(Upādāna) Parivaṭṭa S** (S 22.56.7/3:59) n, SD 3.7. Although the “derived forms” (*upādā, rūpa*, later Pali *upādāya, rūpa*) are mentioned here, their analysis first appears in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (Dhs 596; Tkp 3, qu at Vism 535; Tkp 89, 109; Vism 444), **The Abhidhammattha, saṅgaha** lists 28 “material phenomena” by adding the 4 great elements (earth, water, fire, air) to the head of the list. See BDict: Khandha & also *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Abhs:BRS 6.2-5). For a useful discussion, see Harvey 1993:3-5 (digital ed); also Karunadasa 1967: 38 f & Boisvert 1995:37-42.

¹⁵ *Hadaya, vatthu*, lit “the heart as physical basis” of the mind. This is a late concept. BDict (sv): “The heart according to the commentaries, as well as to the general Buddhist tradition, forms the physical base (*vatthu*) of consciousness. In the canonical texts, however, even in the Abhidhamma-Piṭaka, no such base is ever localized, a fact which seems to have first been discovered by Shwe Zan Oung (*Compendium of Philosophy*, p277 ff). In the Paṭṭhāna, we find repeatedly only the passage: ‘That material thing based on which mind-element and mind-consciousness element function’ (*yaṃ rupam nissāya mano, dhātu ca mano, viññāṇa, dhātu ca vattanti, taṃ rūpaṃ*).” See [3.2] below.

¹⁶ See **Dhātu, vibhaṅga S** (M 140.17/3:241), SD 4.17 & **The body in Buddhism**, SD 29.6a (2.1.6).

1.3.2 The 3 controlling principles**SD 42.19(1.3.2)****Jīvit'indriya Sutta**

The Discourse on the Life Faculty | S 48.22/5:204

Traditional: S 5.4.3.2 Saṃyutta Nikāya 5, Mahā Vagga 4, Indriya Saṃyutta 3, Cha-l-indriya Vagga 2

Theme: The 3 controlling faculties

Bhikshus, there are these three faculties. What are the three?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| (7) The femininity faculty. | <i>itth'indriya</i> |
| (8) The masculinity faculty | <i>puris'indriya</i> |
| (9) The life-faculty | <i>jīvit'indriya</i> |

These, bhikshus, are the three faculties.

— evaṃ —

1.3.2.1 Of the 24 kinds of derived matter [1.3.1], 2 of them—femininity (*itth'indriya*) and masculinity (*puris'indriya*)—are “faculties” (*indriya*). With a third—that of “the life-faculty” (*jīvit'indriya*)—they form the 3 controlling principles (*indriya*), so called because they shape, sustain and control our bodies and minds.¹⁷ Hence, they have both physical and mental aspects.

1.3.2.2 The femininity and the masculinity faculties are rarely mentioned in the suttas, but they are highlighted in **the Saññoga Sutta** (A 7.48).¹⁸ Sexuality, according to the Sutta, has its physical aspects (physical organs, mannerisms, looks, voice, adornments) and its mental aspects (desires, pride and discernment).¹⁹

Sexual desires are rooted in our perceiving of the physical differences between our masculinity and femininity, and perceiving what we are not or do not have, we feel the urge to appropriate or merge with what is seen as “lacking” in us. In this sense, the mental aspects of sexuality are really the “controllers.”²⁰

1.3.2.3 The life-faculty (*jīvit'indriya*). “Life” is called a *faculty* because it has a dominating influence over its constituents. There are 2 kinds of life-faculty: the physical (which vitalizes our physical aspects), and the mental (which vitalizes the associated mental states).

The physical life-faculty as the characteristic of maintaining the co-nascent kinds of matter, that is, their co-existence at the moment of their presence. Its function is that of sustaining their occurrence. It is established in their presence. Its proximate cause is the 4 primary elements that are to be maintained.²¹

Only the mental life-faculty is regarded as a “mental factor” (*cetasika*). It has the *characteristic* of maintaining the associated mental states, the *function* of sustaining their occurrence, the *manifestation* as the establishing of their presence, and its *proximate cause* is the mental states to be maintained.²²

1.4 THE 5 FACULTIES OF FEELING. Early Buddhist psychology has various classifications of feelings.²³ Basically, we have two kinds of feelings: the bodily and the mental. In terms of hedonic tones, we can technically speak of 6 kinds of feelings, that is, 3 of the body (painful, pleasant, neutral) and 3 of the mind (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral).

However, since “neutral” feeling has no direct object or they are not noticed, this is regarded as a single kind of feeling, that is, simply as “neutral feeling.” Hence, we have a total of 5 feelings, common

¹⁷ For defs of *itth'indriyam*, *puris'indriyam*, *jīvit'indriyam*, see Dhs 143,19-29; Vbh 122,22-123,13; Vism 447,7-26; *tīṇ' imāni indriyāni:.... itth'indriyam puris'indriyam jīvit'indriyam* (S 5:204,14). See CPD: *itth'indriya* etc.

¹⁸ A 7.48/4:57-59 = SD 8.7.

¹⁹ A 7.48/4:57-59 [§§2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2] = SD 8.7.

²⁰ For their defs, see Dhs §§33 f; Vbh 122 f. Comy at DhsA 321-323 & Vism 14.58/447.

²¹ Def at Dhs §635 & Vbh 123; Comy at DhsA 323 & Vism 14.59/447. See also Abhs:BRS 240 [VI.3(6)].

²² Abhs:BRS 81 [II.2(6)].

²³ See eg **Bahu Vedaniya S** (M 59/1:396-400), SD 30.4.

mentioned in the suttas. In meditation lingo, they are regarded as “faculties” (*indriya*) because they profoundly affect and shape our thoughts and actions. These 5 faculties of feelings are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| (1) painful physical feeling | <i>dukkh'indriya</i> |
| (2) pleasant physical feeling | <i>sukh'indriya</i> |
| (3) unpleasant mental feeling | <i>dukkh'indriya</i> |
| (4) pleasant mental feeling | <i>somanass'indriya</i> |
| (5) equanimous feeling | <i>upekkh'indriya</i> |

The first 4 are sometimes referred to as the 4 feeling faculties (*cattāri indriyāni*), while the last refers only to the wholesome equanimity of the 4th dhyana (D 3:239).²⁴ A general survey of feelings has been done elsewhere.²⁵

1.5 THE 3 FACULTIES OF KNOWLEDGE. The Aññ'indriya Sutta (S 48.23), a very short text, simply says:

SD 42.19(1.5)

Aññ'indriya Sutta

The Discourse on the Faculty of Final Knowledge | S 48.23/5:204 = It 62/53 with verses, SD 98.5
Traditional: S 5.4.3.3 Saṃyutta Nikāya 5, Mahā Vagga 4, Indriya Saṃyutta 3, Cha-ḷ-indriya Vagga 3
Theme: The 3 faculties of liberating knowledge

Bhikshus, there are these three faculties. What are the three?

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| (1) The faculty, “I shall know the unknown.” | <i>anaññātañ ñassāmīt'indriyam</i> |
| (2) The faculty of final knowledge. | <i>aññ'indriyam</i> |
| (3) The faculty of one accomplished in final knowledge. | <i>aññāta-v-indriyam</i> |

These, bhikshus, are the three faculties.

— evaṃ —

The Saṃyutta Commentary explains the first, “**the faculty, ‘I shall know the unknown’**,” as the faculty arising at the moment of the path of streamwinning for one who is practising with the aspiration, “I will know the Dharma I have not known before in beginningless samsara.”

“**The faculty of final knowledge**” is the knowledge which arises on the 6 occasions from the fruit of streamwinning onwards (up to the fruition of arhathood). It is a deeper knowledge of the first one.

“**The faculty of the one accomplished in final knowledge**” arises in terms of whatever is fully known at the fruiting of arhathood. (SA 3:237)²⁶

2 The 5 spiritual faculties

2.1 THE FACULTIES AS LIMBS OF AWAKENING. The faculties (*indriya*) are most frequently mentioned or treated in lists, or in the wider context, of the limbs of awakening (*bodhipakkhiya, dhamma*).²⁷ These limbs comprise the famous “7 sets” of the basic teachings of early Buddhism, that is,²⁸

²⁴ For an extensive treatment, see S 5:207-216 (Sukh'indriya Vagga); *aparāni pi panēndriyāni: sukh'indriyam...*, D 3:239,12; *cattāri indriyāni: dukkh'indriyam domanass'indriyam sukh'indriyam somanass'indriyañ ca catuttha-jjhāne nirujjhanti, tassa upekkh'indriyam avasiṭṭham bhavati*, Nett 88,4. See also CPD: *sukh'indriya etc.*

²⁵ *Vedanā*, SD 17.3.

²⁶ Further see Pm 1:115,26-116,3 = 2:30,1-12; I 118,13.

²⁷ V 2:240,4; 3:93,7; D 2:120,5; 3:102,13; M 2:11,32; 238,27; S 3:96,9; 4:361,3; A 1:39,28; 4:125,17; Tha 352; 437; 672; 1114; U 56,11; Nm 1:14,6; 55,8; 85,27, etc; Pm 2:86,11, 190,26, 192,17 f; Kvu 85,36, 159,3; Miln 330,-10; Nett 31,14; Vism 687,25; Dīp 15.3.5; Abhs 34,9.

²⁸ For an overview, see *Bodhi.pakkhiya,dhamma*, SD 10.1.

(1) the 4 focuses of mindfulness	<i>cattāro satipaṭṭhāna</i>	SD 13
(2) the 4 right efforts	<i>cattāro samma-p, padhāna</i>	SD 10.2
(3) the 4 paths of spiritual power	<i>cattāro iddhi, pāda</i>	SD 10.3
(4) the 5 spiritual faculties	<i>pañc; indriya</i>	SD 10.4, 42.19
(5) the 5 spiritual powers	<i>pañca bala</i>	SD 10.5
(6) the 7 awakening-factors	<i>satta bojjhaṅga</i>	SD 10.15
(7) the noble eightfold path	<i>ariya aṭṭh'aṅgika magga</i>	SD 6.10

The 5 spiritual faculties (*pañc'indriya*) or “mental faculties,” as we can see here, form the fourth of the 7 sets. The key purpose of these spiritual faculties is to serve as a guide to a harmonious practice leading to dhyana and spiritual liberation.²⁹

The **Āpaṇa Sutta** (S 48.50) gives an instructive analysis of the 5 spiritual faculties, and its SD introduction gives detailed study of each of them.³⁰

2.2 THE FACULTIES AND THE POWERS. The 5 spiritual powers (*bala*) are, in name, identical to the five spiritual faculties. The only difference is that while the spiritual faculties are to be cultivated, and apply to the unawakened and the saints of the path except the arhat. Since the arhat is fully awakened, his spiritual faculties—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom—are all fully developed, in the sense that they have liberated him from defilements and suffering. Hence, their spiritual faculties are called “spiritual powers,” which are as follows:³¹

(1) the spiritual power that is faith,	<i>saddhā bala</i>
(2) the spiritual power that is effort,	<i>virīya bala</i>
(3) the spiritual power that is mindfulness,	<i>sati bala</i>
(4) the spiritual power that is concentration,	<i>samādhi bala</i>
(5) the spiritual power that is wisdom.	<i>wisdom bala</i>

— — —

The Heartwood Discourse

S 48.55/5:231

2 Bhikshus, just as amongst whatever heartwood there is, red sandalwood is said to be the foremost,³²

even so, bhikshus, amongst the dharmas that are conducive to awakening, the faculty of wisdom is declared to be the foremost, that is to say, for the sake of awakening.³³

3 And what, bhikshus, are the dharmas that are conducive to awakening?

Bhikshus

(1) the faculty of faith

saddh'indriya

is a dharma conducive to awakening: it brings about awakening;

(2) the faculty of effort

virīy'indriya

is a dharma conducive to awakening: it brings about awakening;

²⁹ See **Āpaṇa S** (S 48.50), SD 10.4.

³⁰ S 48.50/5:255 f & SD 10.4.

³¹ See **Bodhi.pakkhiya, dhamma**, SD 10.1 (7) & **Pañca bala**, SD 10.5.

³² *Seyyathā'pi bhikkhave ye keci sāra'gandhā, lohita'candanam tesam aggam akkhāyati.*

³³ *Evam eva kho bhikkhave ye keci bodhi.pakkhiyā dhammā, paññ'indriyam tesam aggam akkhāyati yad idam bodhāya.*

